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CIA Objects to Rights Bill

The U.S. Senate was scheduled to consider an "employes' rights" bill just before the Labor Day recess. The leadership, however, got a last-minute request from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that it postpone consideration until after Congress convenes Sept. 11.

The bill, co-sponsored by more than 50 senators, is intended to protect civilian employes of the executive branch of the government from unwarranted government invasion of their privacy.

The measure is aimed at eliminating such practices as requiring employes to lobby for certain legislation, to take part in community or political activities and to buy U.S. Savings bonds. The bill also is intended to curtail prying into the private life of government employes or applicants for government jobs through quizzing them about their sex lives, personal finances, religion or family relationships. The bill also would restrict the use of lie detectors.

The CIA and the National Security Agency must be vigilant in checking on employes and applicants for employment. The proposed legislation recognizes this problem. Directors of the two agencies could authorize use of lie detectors to protect the national security. They also could require employes to disclose personal information for the same reason.

Hearings have been held over a period of more than a year on the legislation. Ample evidence has been produced to show unwarranted governmental invasion of privacy of civilian employes. Government agencies have had an opportunity to present their views at these hearings, but the CIA declined to appear.

The CIA, however, filed a 10-page statement of objections with Senator Sam Ervin (Dem., N.C.). The senator noted that "like any CIA greeting of 'good morning,' the statement was marked 'secret.' " Ervin contends every valid CIA objection to the original bill has been met with amendments.

If CIA still is dissatisfied with the proposed legislation, we believe it should express its views at an open hearing. Surely that wouldn't endanger national security. The need for military secrecy is often used as a justification for hiding administrative failures which should be exposed. Ervin suggested that the CIA investigate itself to see whether its officials have been violating the law which prohibits them from lobbying with members of Congress.

Ervin also believes the CIA is driving some of the brightest minds from government employment because of deplorable personnel practices in subjecting applicants to insulting polygraph and psychological tests. He may have a valid argument on that point, too.

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